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ABSTRACT

This report examines the wealth of Pennsylvania school districts, the effort districts exert to support education, school expenditures, and the effects of district wealth on students. Important findings related to disparities in wealth and spending on education include: (1) the polarization of wealth distribution during the 1980s made over 90% of rural school districts and over 50% of urban school districts below the state average in wealth per student; (2) the wealthiest school districts raise nearly four times as much local revenue per student as the poorest school districts; (3) poorer school districts exert a greater tax effort to support education; (4) expenditures for instruction, teacher salaries, and specialized classrooms are greater in wealthy school districts; (5) poorer districts have higher dropout rates; and (6) a smaller percentage of high school seniors from poorer school districts plan to get a postsecondary education. Adequate funding should be provided to guarantee children a quality basic education, which will require changes in the way education is funded in Pennsylvania. Telecommunications can increase educational opportunities in rural schools. Efforts should be increased to encourage students to further their education after high school, particularly in scientific and technological fields. In addition, more educational partnerships should be formed to increase resources. This document contains tables, figures, and a map of school districts. (KS)

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RICH SCHOOLS - POOR SCHOOLS

CHALLENGES FOR RURAL AND URBAN PENNSYLVANIA

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RICH SCHOOLS - POOR SCHOOLS
CHALLENGES FOR RURAL AND URBAN PENNSYLVANIA

July 1991
Technical Paper No. 8

A Report Prepared by

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Introduction

The release in the early 1980s of *A Nation at Risk,* a federal study about education in America, put education on the national agenda. *A Nation at Risk* sparked debate about education throughout the 1980s at the national, state, and local levels and this debate continues today. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania prepared the following report to help frame some of the educational issues that confront the Commonwealth.

Throughout this country's history, education has been the vehicle for transforming the nation and facing external challenges. *A Nation at Risk* argued that the country's educational system was not up to the task of preparing the nation to face the challenges of an increasingly competitive and technological global economy.

To grow and prosper, Pennsylvania needs to directly address its unique challenges. One of the Commonwealth's unique challenges is its rural population, the largest in the nation. Rural areas in Pennsylvania have traditionally lagged behind the rest of the state in educational achievement. This lower educational achievement did not threaten rural development in the past when little formal education was needed to get a good paying job. Today, it is increasingly difficult to find a good paying job if you do not have at least a high school degree. During the remainder of the 1990s, more than 50 percent of all new jobs will require some education beyond a high school degree. Without a well-educated work force, rural areas will not be able to attract the industries creating these jobs and they will continue to lose existing industries that modernize to remain competitive.

Today, urban school districts face many of the same challenges as rural districts. The similarity between rural and urban school districts is low wealth. Poor rural and urban school districts have difficulty funding their schools adequately to provide students with a quality basic education. As the quality of school programs decline in rural and urban areas so does their ability to prosper.

The following pages of this report highlight the condition of education in Pennsylvania. The report examines the wealth of Pennsylvania school districts, the effort districts exert to support education, school expenditures, as well as some of the affects of district wealth on students.

Rich Schools - Poor Schools
Challenges for Rural and Urban Pennsylvania

Highlights

Over 90 percent of all rural school districts can be classified as poor because they are below the state average in wealth available per student.

Of 194 rural school districts, 178 had less wealth available per student than the state average in 1988.

Local wealth available to support education varies widely across Pennsylvania.

In 1988, the average wealth available per student in Pennsylvania was $205,911 and ranged from $60,000 in poorer school districts to over $1,000,000 in wealthier districts.

Poor school districts exert a greater effort to support education than wealthy districts.

The majority of poorer school districts had tax efforts above the state average in 1988.

The poorest school districts would have had to double their tax rates in 1988 to raise local revenue equal to the state average.

Fewer high school seniors from poorer school districts plan to get a postsecondary education.

Less than 50 percent of high school seniors from the poorest school districts planned to get a postsecondary education in 1989.

In 1989, nearly 80 percent of the high school seniors from the wealthiest school districts planned to get a postsecondary education.

Rich Schools - Poor Schools

Challenges for Rural and Urban Pennsylvania

This report focuses on:

Disparities in wealth among the state's 501 school districts

Differences in spending on education among rich and poor districts

Opportunities for strengthening education

A competitive global economy is emerging around the world. To compete, rural Pennsylvania businesses will need a ready supply of well-educated workers in the 1990s and beyond. Producing a well-educated work force will challenge public schools in the Commonwealth.

To meet the challenges of the 1990s and beyond, each school district in the state will have to provide a quality basic education that prepares students for immediate entry into the job market or to attend postsecondary schools. Provision of quality basic education requires adequate funding in all Commonwealth school districts.

School District Wealth

A measure of a school district's wealth is the total resources of the community. School district wealth--in this report--is the **Market Value of Taxable Real Property in a district PLUS the Total Personal Income of school district residents.**

A measure of the **potential** of a school district to finance education is the local wealth divided by the number of students:

$$\text{Wealth Per Student} = \frac{\text{Personal Income of Residents} + \text{Market Value of Taxable Real Property}}{\text{ADM (Average Daily Membership)}}$$

Wealth Varies Widely in Pennsylvania's School Districts

Presently, there is great disparity in wealth per student among the Commonwealth's 501 school districts. The average wealth per student in Pennsylvania in 1988 was $205,911, but it ranged from almost $60,000 to over $1,000,000 (Table 1).

Table 1
Wealth Ranking of Pennsylvania's 501 School Districts

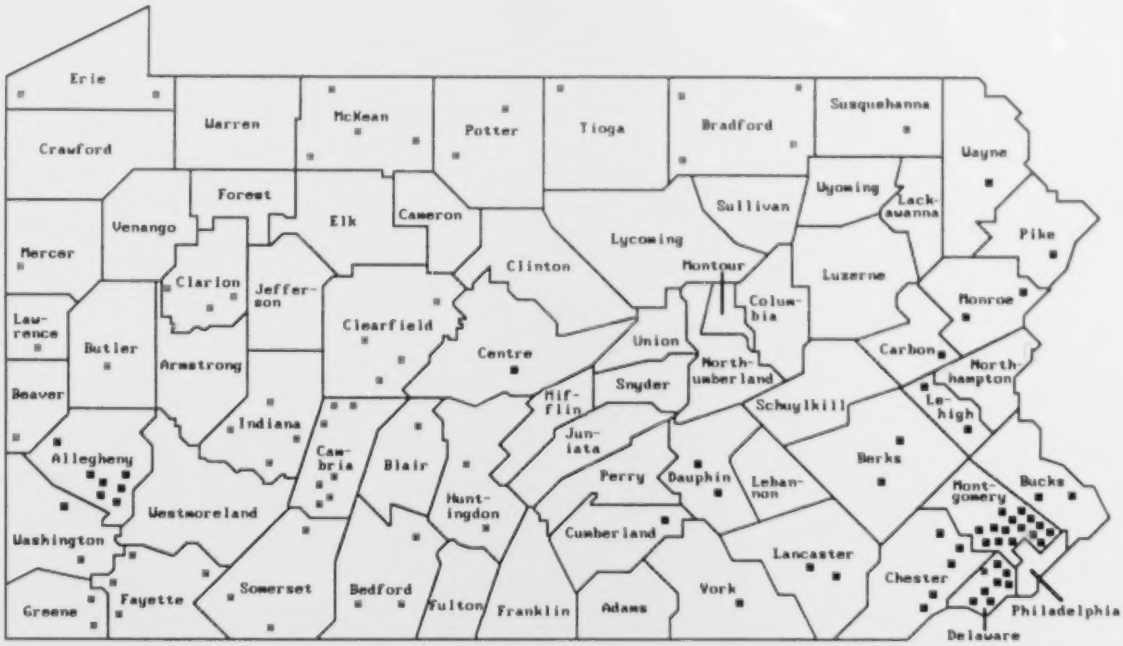
Wealth Per Student, 1988 (State Average, 1988 = $205,911)		Number of School Districts		
Rank	Percent of State Average	42 Rural Counties	25 Urban Counties	Statewide Total
Very Wealthy	150% & above	5	48	53
Wealthy	100% -- 149%	11	92	103
Poor	50% -- 99%	138	154	292
Very Poor	Less Than 50%	40	13	53
Total		194	307	501

- **Over 90 percent of rural school districts are below the state average in wealth per student**
- **More than 50 percent of urban school districts are below the state average in wealth per student**
- **Over 60 percent of all public school students are in school districts with below the state average in wealth per student**

The Location of Rich and Poor School Districts*

In 1988, the 53 wealthiest school districts were mainly in suburban southeastern Pennsylvania and suburban Allegheny County. Both areas experienced rapid economic growth and low unemployment in the 1980s--especially in the expansion period of 1986-89. The 53 poorest school districts in 1988 were mainly in south-central and western Pennsylvania, and in the northern tier counties. The 1982 recession rocked the economies of most of these counties and they have been slow to recover (Map 1).

Map 1. Distribution of the Wealthiest and Poorest School Districts, 1988



■ **Poorest School Districts** ■ **Wealthiest School Districts**

Of the remaining school districts, most of the 103 wealthy school districts were in suburban areas of the southeast and Allegheny County. In contrast, most of the 292 poor school districts were in northern, western, and south-central Pennsylvania.

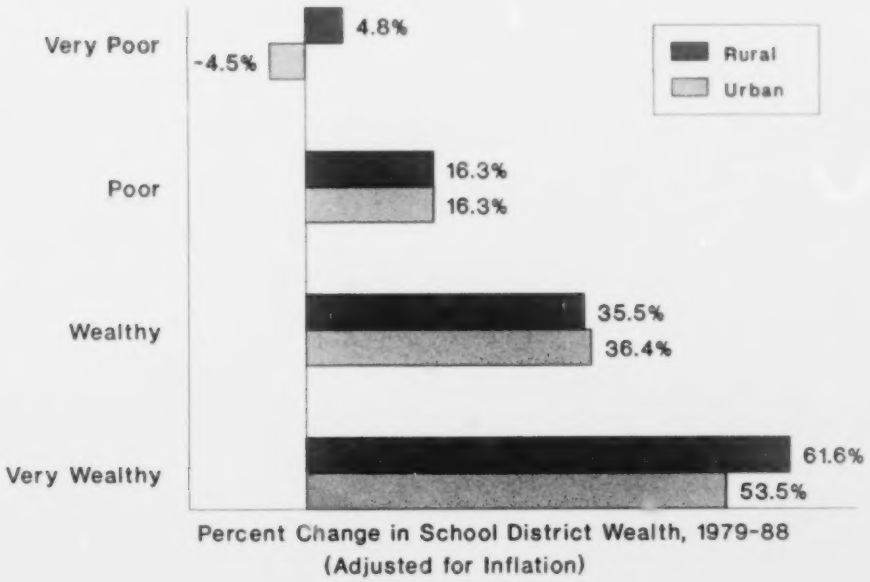
*A count by county of school districts ranked by wealth is provided in Table 3 as an appendix to this report.

Trends in Wealth in the 1980s

During the 1980s, total school district wealth in the 53 very wealthy school districts expanded over 50 percent and over 35 percent in the 103 wealthy districts. Most of these school districts were located in the prosperous southeast and in the suburbs of Allegheny County.

Poor school districts located in the economically depressed areas in central, northern, and western Pennsylvania--areas hard-hit economically in the 1980s--experienced little expansion in their taxable wealth during the 1980s (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Tax Base of the Poorest School Districts Grew Slowly in the 1980s



Percent Change in School District Wealth, 1979-88
(Adjusted for Inflation)

- **The average wealth per student contracted in the poorest urban districts and expanded only slightly in the poorest rural districts.**

- **In both urban and rural poor school districts, total wealth expanded only 16 percent.**

School District Revenues

- **The Wealthiest School Districts Raise Nearly Four Times as Much Local Revenue Per Student as the Poorest School Districts.**

- **Poorer School Districts Exert a Greater Effort to Support Education Than Wealthier Districts.**

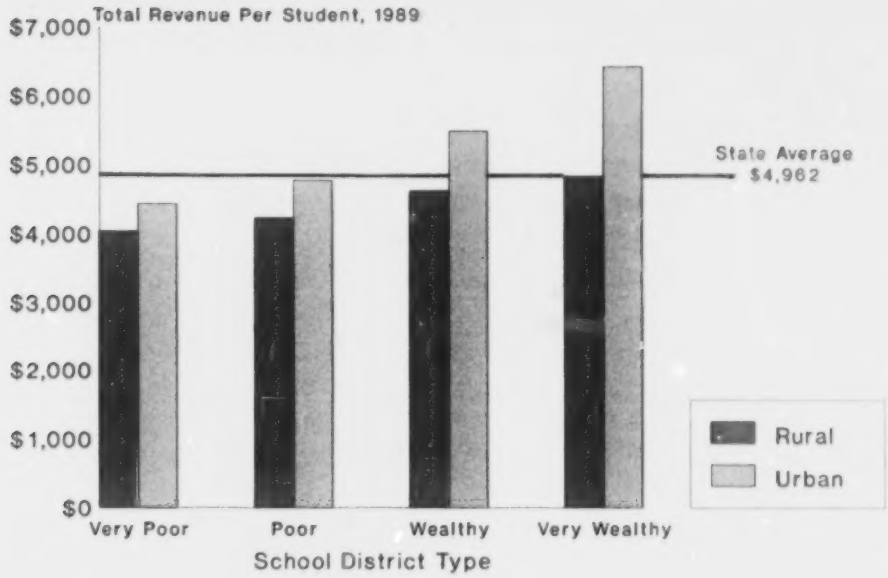
Pennsylvania's school districts get most of their financial support from state subsidies and local revenues. However, total revenues per student and the mix of dollars from state and local sources varies widely across school districts.

As school districts' wealth per student increases:

- **Total revenues per student increase**
- **State subsidies per student decrease**
- **Local revenues raised per student increase**
- **Local tax efforts to support education decrease**

Total revenues raised per student are much higher in wealthy districts than in poor school districts of rural and urban Pennsylvania (Figure 2). In 1989, the total revenues in the 53 poorest school districts averaged $4,141 per student compared to $6,306 in the 53 wealthiest school districts. The wealthiest school districts had $2,165 or over 50 percent more to spend on each student than the poorest districts.

Figure 2. Total Revenue per Student is Lower in Poorer School Districts



Total revenues available per student increase sharply as a school district's wealth increases. This is because state revenues per student decline only moderately, but local revenues per student increase markedly with increasing local wealth.

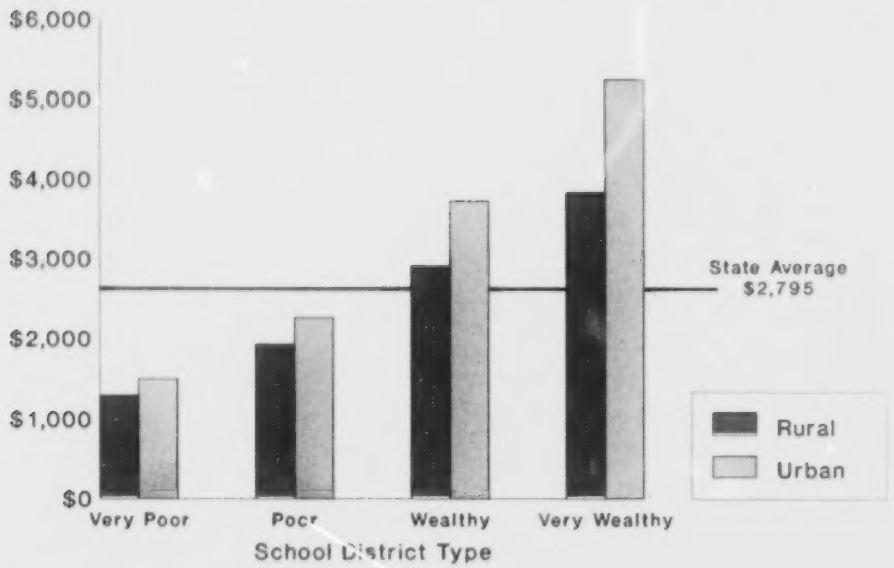
As a school district's wealth increases, the state's total educational subsidy to the district decreases (Figure 3).

Figure 3. State Contributions to Districts Decrease as Wealth Increases

State revenues averaged $2,239 per student in the 53 poorest school districts compared to $881 in the 53 wealthiest school districts. On average, the poorest school districts received $1,358 more per student from the state than the richest districts. But, even this additional state funding did not bring the poorest school districts' revenues per student up to the state average in 1988.

As school district wealth increases, local revenues increase (Figure 4). Local revenues averaged $1,341 per student in the poorest school districts compared to $5,138 in the wealthiest school districts. On average, the wealthiest districts raised $3,797 more local revenue per student than the poorest districts.

Figure 4. Local Revenues Increase Sharply as District Wealth Increases



Poorer School Districts Exert Greater Effort to Support Their Schools

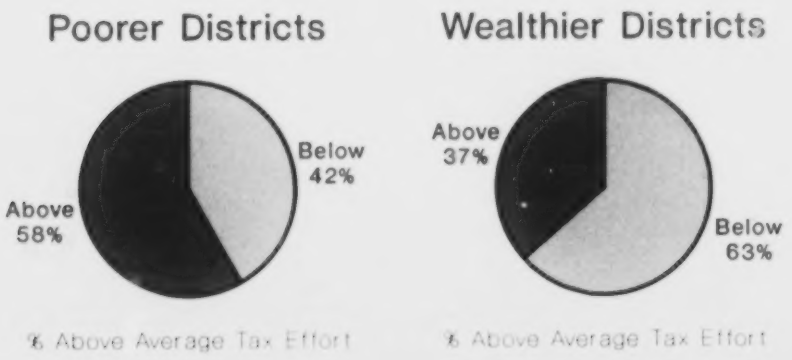
In 1989, the 53 wealthiest school districts raised nearly four times as much local revenue per student than the 53 poorest districts. This was due entirely to the greater taxable wealth in the wealthier districts, not to differences in tax rates. In fact, poorer school districts exert a greater effort to support education by taxing themselves at relatively higher rates than wealthy districts.

A measure of local tax effort to support education is the ratio of local revenues to local wealth:

$$\text{Local Effort} = \frac{\text{Local Tax Revenue}}{\text{Local Wealth}}$$

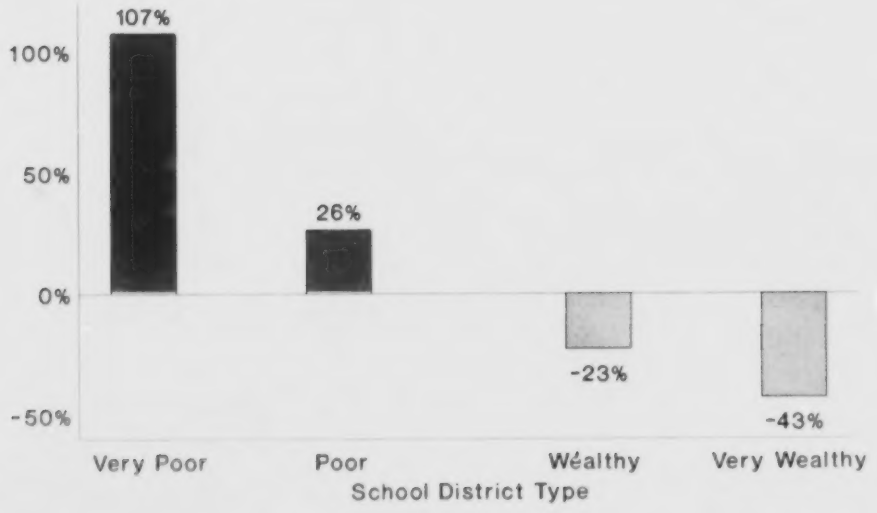
In 1988, 58 percent of the poor and very poor school districts had a tax effort above the state average. In contrast, less than 40 percent of the wealthy and very wealthy districts had tax efforts above the state average (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Local Effort to Support Schools is Greater in Poor Districts



From another perspective, this means that in 1988 the poorest school districts would have had to double their tax rates to generate local revenues per student equal to the state average. In contrast, the wealthiest school districts could have cut their tax rates almost in half and still raised local revenues per student equal to the state average. Clearly, the poorer school districts strongly support education as measured by tax effort (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Amount School Districts Would Have to Increase Taxes to Raise Local Revenues to State Average



Expenditures Increase with School District Wealth

Instructional Expenses

In 1989, wealthy school districts spent more money per student and spent more on major items such as instruction, administration, and plant maintenance than poorer school districts (Table 2). A major expense item that was higher in wealthy school districts in 1989 was the cost of regular instruction per student. The cost of regular instruction averaged $1,752 per student in the 53 poorest school districts compared to $2,880 per student in the 53 wealthiest school districts.

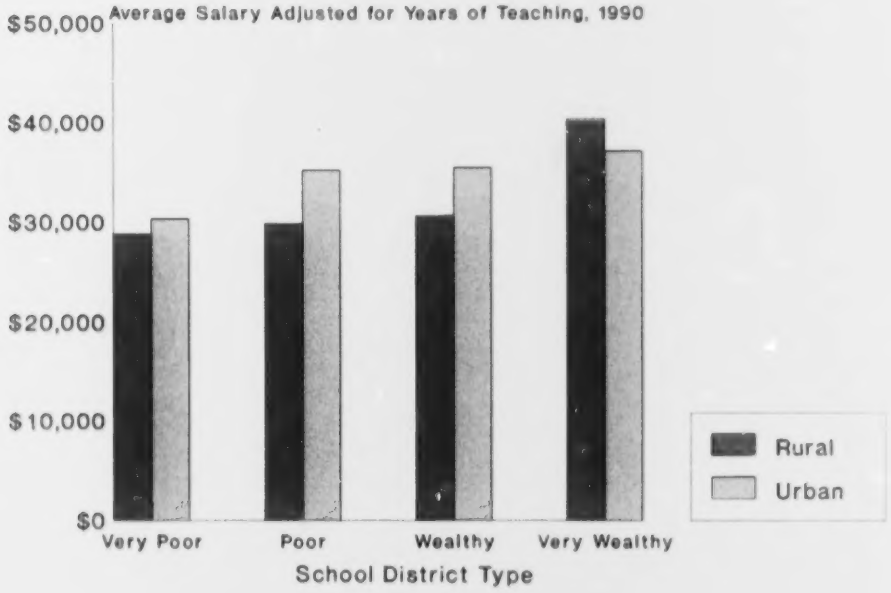
Table 2
Expenditures Increase with District Wealth

Expenditure Item	Expenditure Per Student School District Type			
	Very Poor	Poor	Wealthy	Very Wealthy
Instructional				
Regular Instruction				
Rural	$1,758	$1,863	$1,993	$2,099
Urban	$1,734	$2,116	$2,453	$2,949
Special Education				
Rural	$180	$198	$182	$185
Urban	$294	$283	$291	$378
Vo-Tech				
Rural	$234	$222	$215	$233
Urban	$281	$280	$222	$159
Noninstructional				
Administration				
Rural	$260	$289	$338	$402
Urban	$326	$316	$375	$440
Plant Maintenance				
Rural	$400	$430	$444	$485
Urban	$516	$518	$502	$700

Teacher Salaries

Higher teacher salaries in wealthier school districts may have contributed to their higher instructional costs. In 1990, the average teacher salary in the 53 poorest school districts was $29,181 compared to $37,340 in the 53 wealthiest school districts (Figure 7). In addition to teachers' salaries, administration, and plant maintenance, expenditures per student also tended to be higher in wealthy school districts.

Figure 7. Teachers Salaries Are Lower in Poorer School Districts



Specialized Classrooms

The variety of classrooms available in a school district reflects its resources. Poorer school districts typically have fewer specialized classrooms than in rich school districts. The types of classrooms less available in poorer school districts are:

- **Kindergarten Rooms**
- **Science Labs**
- **Business Labs**
- **Computer Labs**
- **Art & Music Rooms**
- **Natatoriums**

Dropout Rates, Postsecondary Education, and School District Wealth

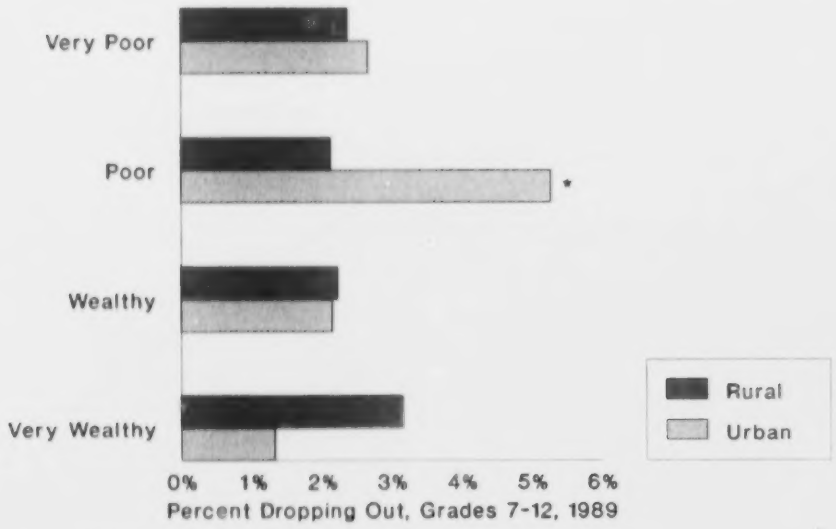
A major goal of public education in Pennsylvania is to prepare students to enter the job market or get a postsecondary education. Two indicators of whether school districts achieve these goals are: the dropout rates in grades 7-12, and the percent of seniors planning to pursue postsecondary education.

Factors beyond the control of schools may play the strongest role in students' decisions to dropout of school or to further their education after high school. A study by the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Universities found that parents' preferences were the strongest factor influencing their children's postsecondary education plans. This was true regardless of family income, living in a rural or urban area, and a racial or ethnic group.

Poorer Districts Have Higher Dropout Rates Than Wealthy Districts

In 1989, the problem of students dropping out of school was greater in poorer than in wealthier school districts in both rural and urban areas. The average dropout rate for grades 7-12 for the 53 poorest districts was 2.5 percent compared to 1.5 percent in the 53 wealthiest districts (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Dropout Rates are Higher in Poorer Districts

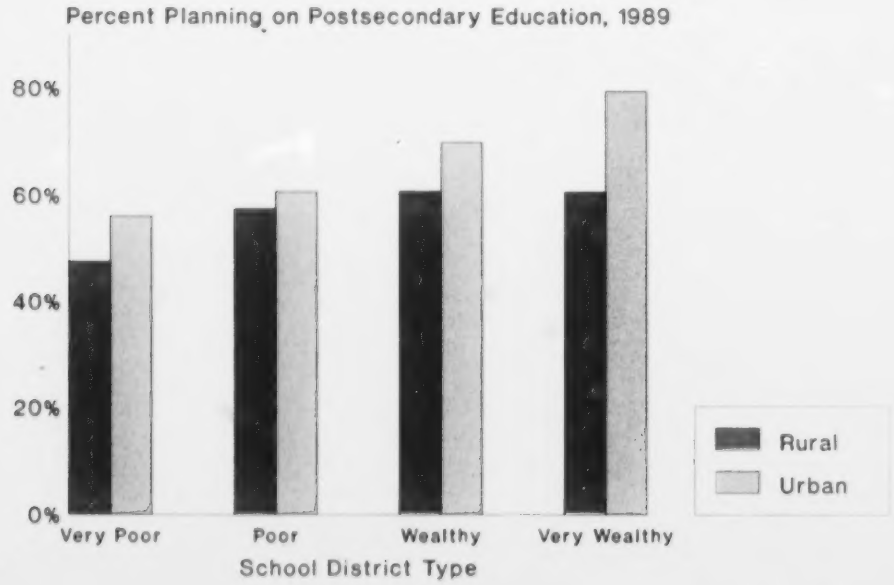


*Includes Philadelphia School District with a dropout rate of 11.87%
Average for Poor Urban without Philadelphia is 2.61%.

A Smaller Percentage of High School Seniors From Poorer School Districts Plan to Get a Postsecondary Education

The rate of high school seniors planning to further their education was lower in the poorer than in the wealthier school districts. In 1989, less than 50 percent of seniors in the poorest school districts planned to further their education after high school compared to nearly 80 percent in the wealthiest school districts (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Fewer High School Seniors From Poorer Districts Plan to Further Their Education After High School



Opportunities for Education in Pennsylvania in the 1990s and Beyond

Provide Adequate Funding to Guarantee All Children a Quality Basic Education

Spending more money on schools does not guarantee a better education. But, without more resources, the poor school districts cannot afford to provide their students with a quality basic education. In Pennsylvania, a disproportionate share of poor school districts are in rural areas.

This report shows that poor school districts exert more effort to support their schools than wealthy districts. Poor school districts simply do not have the tax base needed to support education adequately.

The purpose of the state's basic education subsidies is to insure that all the Commonwealth's children have access to a quality basic education, regardless of where they live. As now applied, the state education subsidies are not achieving this goal. A variety of alternatives exist to better insure that all of Pennsylvania's children have access to a quality basic education.

Challenge the Way Education is Funded

Small, rural, and poor school districts are challenging the legality of Pennsylvania's subsidies for basic education. School districts, filing the lawsuit, base it on the Pennsylvania Constitution which states the General Assembly "shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education" (Article III, Section 14). The lawsuit contends that the current system of subsidies for basic education is neither thorough nor efficient.

Similar lawsuits in Texas and Kentucky led to court orders to correct the inequities in their systems for supporting basic education. In Texas, the state's Supreme Court declared that the method of funding public education was unconstitutional because it was "inefficient." In Texas, like Pennsylvania, school districts derived most of their local funding from property taxes. Districts with high property values could support their schools easily with relatively low tax rates. Poor school districts with low property values had difficulty supporting their schools despite a high tax effort. In its decision, the Texas Supreme Court emphasized that inequities in funding education lead to inequities in the quality of education.

Kentucky's method of funding education was also challenged in court because of funding inequities among school districts. In its decision, the Kentucky Supreme Court not only ordered that the state correct inequities in how it funded basic education, but also declared that the entire public educational system caused these inequities. The Court ordered a reorganization of the entire educational system.

Use an Alternative to the Property Tax to Support Schools

A way to address inadequate educational funding is to reconsider how schools raise money. Most local funding for education comes from property taxes. Wealthy school districts have higher-valued real estate to be taxed and have little difficulty raising money to support their schools. Poor school districts have lower-valued real estate and have difficulty raising enough money to support their schools. This report shows how poor school districts cannot raise enough local revenue even though they exert more effort than wealthy districts. Tax reform that would allow school districts to tax personal income or to earmark a percentage of the state income tax for education are two alternatives. In 1989, however, voters rejected tax reform that would have permitted school districts to tax residents' personal income. Despite this setback, tax reform should still be considered as an alternative to address inequities in funding education.

Use Telecommunications to Increase Educational Opportunities in Rural Schools

Providing schools with more money does not guarantee that it will solve all their problems. Rural schools often have problems that more money alone may not be able to solve. Innovative approaches, like teleteaching, may help rural school districts address some of the problems they face.

Teleteaching is a high-tech approach to economically and efficiently bring educational resources to rural schools. Rural schools often have difficulty recruiting mathematics, science, and foreign language teachers, or they can only offer a narrow range of choices in these and other subjects. Rural schools also have limited access to cultural and enrichment activities for their students. Telecommunications technologies could help schools overcome these hurdles by linking students in one or more locations with a teacher or educational resource in another location. The technologies used can be as simple and inexpensive as computer terminals, modems, and telephone lines, or as sophisticated and expensive as two-way interactive video systems and satellite up-links.

Legislation before the General Assembly known as the *Long-Distance Teaching Program Act* (HB 1632) would aid rural schools in the use of telecommunications. The program would provide training and support for teachers and school administrators so they could effectively use telecommunications technologies. The program would also make funds available to the neediest rural schools to help them buy telecommunications equipment and software.

Increase Efforts That Encourage Students to Further Their Education After High School

The time is rapidly fading when a high school education is enough preparation to get a good paying job. More than half of all new jobs created in the 1990s will require education beyond a high school degree. The Commonwealth has the fifth largest population in the nation, but it ranks near the bottom for the number of its college-aged population enrolled in higher education. To attract new industry and keep existing industry, Pennsylvania needs a well-educated work force.

In 1989, 64 percent of all Pennsylvania high school seniors planned to further their education after high school. In urban areas, 66 percent of all high school seniors planned to pursue a postsecondary education compared to only 56 percent of rural high school seniors. Without a postsecondary education, rural high school graduates will not have the skills to fill the new jobs the economy is creating. In addition, without a qualified work force, rural areas will not be able to attract new businesses and industries to foster their development.

If only 2,500 more rural high school seniors had planned to pursue a postsecondary education in 1989, the rural rate for postsecondary education plans would have equaled the state average. There are programs designed to encourage rural high school students to pursue a postsecondary education. *Project for an Informed Choice*, a pilot program in five schools with low postsecondary attendance rates, tried to increase the number of students furthering their education after high school. The program targeted eighth graders and their parents.

A Rural Center funded project evaluated *Project for an Informed Choice* and found that activities involving parents, field trips to colleges, and high-tech career counseling aids were effective ways to change students and parents' attitudes positively about postsecondary education. Legislation was introduced but not passed to support projects like *Project for an Informed Choice* in rural school districts with low postsecondary enrollment rates. The General Assembly should reconsider the benefits of encouraging more students to further their education after high school.

Expand Efforts That Direct Students Into Scientific and Technological Careers

A postsecondary education is not only important to rural students and rural economies, but the types of degrees students earn is also important. Degrees in science and technological fields are especially important. Our economy increasingly relies on science and technology. Without people trained in these fields, Pennsylvania and the nation's competitiveness in the global economy will suffer. The National Academy of Science predicts the U.S. will experience a shortage of scientists as early as the late 1990s. It takes a minimum of 20 years to train a scientist. To meet our future demand for scientists, we must begin training them today.

The Rural Center funded two projects designed to increase rural students' interest in science and careers in science. One project developed an innovative science curriculum for elementary schools. The curriculum fostered positive attitudes toward science among students and teachers. It did this by making students active learners and linking science to their daily lives. A second Rural Center funded science project encouraged adolescents, especially girls, to consider careers in science. The project sponsored career workshops conducted by people from local communities who worked in science-oriented jobs. Following a science demonstration, students learned about career opportunities in science. Expansion of activities like these would encourage more rural students to choose careers in science and technology.

Form More Educational Partnerships to Leverage Scarce Resources

This report shows that many rural school districts have less resources than the state average. Having less resources means that rural schools often must offer fewer programs and services to their students. The Rural Center funded a project that examined how partnerships between schools, local businesses and community organizations can improve schools. Educational partnerships may involve career activities, tutoring programs, social enrichment activities, or a host of other activities. These partnerships help to forge linkages between schools and their communities. The linkages promote coordination between the skills that students learn in school and the skills they need to find jobs or to further their education. A Rural Center funded project not only helped to start several pilot educational partnerships, but it also produced a guide to help others start partnerships in their schools. Rural schools need to form more educational partnerships to expand the resources available to their students. To start educational partnerships, rural schools can build on the experience of this Rural Center funded project.

Table 3
Distribution of School Districts by Wealth, 1988

(Rural Counties Shaded Red)

County	Very Poor	Poor	Wealthy	Very Wealthy	Total
Adams		3	3		6
Allegheny		14	22	7	43
Armstrong		4			4
Beaver	1	13			14
Bedford	3	2			5
Berks		3	12	2	17
Blair	1	6			7
Bradford	4	3			7
Bucks		2	9	2	13
Butler	1	6			7
Cambria	7	3	2		12
Cameron		1			1
Carbon		4		1	5
Centre		3		1	4
Chester		4	3	5	12
Clarion	3	3	1		7
Clearfield	4	4			8
Clinton		1			1
Columbia		6			6
Crawford		3			3
Cumberland		4	4	1	9
Dauphin		7	1	2	10
Delaware	1	3	4	7	15
Elk		3			3
Erie	2	9	2		13
Fayette	4	2			6
Forest		1			1
Franklin		5			5
Fulton		3			3
Greene	2	3			5

Table 3
Distribution of School Districts by Wealth, 1988

(Rural Counties Shaded Red)

County	Very Poor	Poor	Wealthy	Very Wealthy	Total
Huntingdon	2	2			4
Indiana	4	3			7
Jefferson		3			3
Juniata		1			1
Lackawanna		7	3		10
Lancaster		5	9	2	16
Lawrence	1	6	1		8
Lebanon		4	2		6
Lehigh		4	3	2	9
Luzerne		10	2		12
Lycoming		7	1		8
McKean	4	1			5
Mercer	1	11			12
Mifflin		2			2
Monroe		1	1	2	4
Montgomery		3	4	15	22
Montour		1			1
Northampton		4	4		8
Northumberland		6			6
Perry		4			4
Philadelphia		1			1
Pike				1	1
Potter	2	3			5
Schuylkill		12			12
Snyder		2			2
Somerset	3	8			11
Sullivan			1		1
Susquehanna	1	5			6
Tioga	1	2			3
Union		1	1		2

Table 3
Distribution of School Districts by Wealth, 1988

(Rural Counties Shaded Red)

County	Very Poor	Poor	Wealthy	Very Wealthy	Total
Venango		5			5
Warren		1			1
Washington	1	12		1	14
Wayne		1	1	1	3
Westmoreland		14	3		17
Wyoming		2			2
York		10	4	1	15
Total	**53**	**292**	**103**	**53**	**501**